

VZCZCXRO8458  
PP RUEHAG RUEHROV  
DE RUEHCV #0823/01 1161914  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 261914Z APR 07  
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8491  
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHWH/WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS PRIORITY  
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CARACAS 000823

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

HQSOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD  
DEPT PASS TO AID/OTI RPORTER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/26/2017  
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [SCUL](#) [VE](#)  
SUBJECT: INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS TO BRV: RCTV CLOSURE  
VIOLATES FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

REF: A. SANTIAGO 00597  
    [1](#)B. SANTIAGO 00619  
    [1](#)C. CARACAS 00357  
    [1](#)D. CARACAS 00053  
    [1](#)E. STATE 52361  
    [1](#)F. BUENOS AIRES 00700  
    [1](#)G. MADRID 00677  
    [1](#)H. MADRID 00741

CARACAS 00000823 001.2 OF 003

Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR DANIEL LAWTON  
FOR REASON 1.4 (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. As the May 28 deadline for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela's (BRV's) closure of independent television station Radio Caracas Television (RCTV) approaches, prominent international organizations, legislative bodies, and local support groups are becoming more vocal. Numerous institutions, including the OAS and international media watch dogs, have recently criticized the BRV's decision to not renew RCTV's broadcasting license and have expressed concern that its closure violates freedom of expression. Despite the legitimate concerns raised by these organizations, BRV officials continue to attack RCTV and its supporters while ignoring their complaints. END SUMMARY.

-----  
The Chilean Senate  
-----

[1](#)2. (U) The Chilean Senate passed an April 11 resolution calling on Chilean President Michelle Bachelet to protest, via the OAS, the BRV's decision to revoke RCTV's broadcasting license (ref A). The resolution characterized RCTV's closure as "a transgression of freedom of thought and expression," and noted that such an act violates the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights. It also argued that the BRV's decision to close RCTV is "solely based on (RCTV's) efforts to maintain an editorial line that differs from that of the government's."

[1](#)3. (U) Chavez reacted harshly to the resolution. He referred to the Chilean senators as "fascists" and claimed he had "an obligation to defend Venezuela's sovereignty." On April 13, the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Bachelet expressed their objections to Chavez' remarks, demanding respect for Chilean institutions (ref B). Chavez subsequently attempted to reassure Bachelet that his statements were intended for the Senate, not her government.

-----  
OAS Takes Venezuela To Court  
-----

¶4. (U) The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) filed an April 20 case against the BRV with the Inter-American Human Rights Court for "violating freedom of expression and for failing to provide judicial protection to RCTV workers and journalists." IACHR President Florentin Melendez said the decision is a result of the BRV's refusal to address IACHR's longstanding concerns with the BRV's decision to revoke RCTV's license. The IACHR has expressed over the state of the media in Venezuela before. In its quarterly report, the Office of the OAS Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression noted January 29 that it continues to monitor RCTV's licensing case closely (ref C). The report referenced a July 2006 advisory note sent by the IACHR to the Ministry of Popular Power for Foreign Affairs reminding the BRV that the OAS Democratic Charter establishes that signatory states must refrain from infringing on freedom of expression by indirect methods such as abuse of official controls or any other actions that limit the free flow of ideas.

-----  
Press Society: BRV Violates Freedom of Expression  
-----

¶5. (U) At an Inter-American Press Society (SIP) conference in Colombia, SIP President Rafael Molina accused the BRV March 18 of exercising a "deliberate campaign" against freedom of expression. Molina called attention to the BRV's continued harassment of independent media outlets and specifically mentioned RCTV's case. According to Molina, President Chavez and BRV officials refused SIP's invitation to discuss the state of the media in Venezuela on three separate occasions.

CARACAS 00000823 002.2 OF 003

¶6. (U) Minister of Popular Power for Communication and Information William Lara accused SIP members March 16 of taking part in the events surrounding the coup of April 2002, and demanded "an apology" for the SIP's "attempts to destabilize Venezuelan democracy."

-----  
International Watchdog Organizations  
-----

¶7. (U) As World Press Freedom Day approaches (May 3), an increasing number of international media watchdog organizations have criticized the BRV's decision to revoke RCTV's license.

-- The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), a nonprofit media organization, released an April 24 report accusing the BRV of closing RCTV for political reasons. According to CPJ, RCVT's closure sets an alarming precedent and casts doubt on Venezuela's commitment to freedom of expression.

-- On April 25, the International Press Institute (IPI), a global network of editors, media executives, and journalists dedicated to safeguarding press freedom, condemned the BRV's attacks on the media in Venezuela in their annual report. The IPI denounced the deaths of two journalist in 2006 and reported that, "independent media outlets have routinely been the victims of verbal and physical attacks, as well as legal and administrative harassment." In 2000, Venezuela was placed on IPI's Watch List for Chavez' criticism of local and international media groups. In 2003, IPI's Executive Board decided to keep Venezuela on the list, claiming that, "(the) deterioration of the press freedom was the result of President Chavez' frequent verbal attacks on the press."

-- The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), a

conglomerate of media unions, issued an April 25 press release noting that "shutting down a broadcaster without due process and threatening union autonomy could lead to more attacks on fundamental rights." IFJ's General Secretary Aidan White expressed concern for the 2,000 workers that will be directly and indirectly affected by RCTV's closure.

¶8. (U) Following Chavez' January 8 speech, where he outlined his plan to not renew RCTV's broadcasting license, numerous organizations expressed their concern over the BRV's handling of RCTV's case.

-- On January 5, OAS Secretary General Jose Manuel Insulza called on the BRV to reconsider its position. Insulza called on media outlets to not be coerced into silence and to continue exercising their right to inform the public (ref. d).

-- On January 12, both the CJP and the Press and Society Institute conveyed their alarm over the lack of transparency in Chavez' decision to not renew RCTV's license. The organizations "urge(d) the government to be more committed to the requirements of free expression."

-- On January 15, CPJ requested that Chavez refrain from making "menacing statements" regarding RCTV because these could have a "chilling effect on the press."

-- On January 23, White of IFJ said Chavez' attacks on independent media outlets "has all the potential to become a catastrophe for pluralism and social rights." Additionally, White commented that, "The closure of RCVT...will be a disaster both for democracy and for the people involved."

-- Reporters without Borders issued a January 25 open letter to Chavez expressing concern over the BRV's assaults on independent media outlets, specifically RCTV. They argued that, "Rather than just a legal problem or a dispute about the date on which licenses expire, (RCTV's) case raises the issue of media pluralism and the need for an independent press in a democracy."

-----  
LOCAL SUPPORT  
-----

¶9. (U) Local RCTV supporters have also increased their efforts to raise public awareness regarding the outlet's imminent closure. Opposition political party Primero

CARACAS 00000823 003.2 OF 003

Justicia (PJ), for instance, organized a signature drive and painted solidarity murals, while RCTV employees and family members held a small vigil in downtown Caracas. Separately, Julio Borges of PJ and RCTV owner Marcel Granier met with European Parliamentarians April 24 in Brussels to discuss international support for the media outlet. Finally, over 25 civil society organizations and political parties, including the Venezuelan Workers Confederation (CTV), COPEI, Accion Democratica (AD), Un Nuevo Tiempo (UNT), PJ, and the National Resistance Movement (CNR) organized an April 21 march to RCTV's headquarters to demonstrate their support for the station.

-----  
Comment  
-----

¶10. (C) Chavez and BRV officials show nothing but disdain for the legitimate concerns over freedom of expression presented by international organizations. Moreover, Chavez has questioned their motives and accused them of conspiring with the USG to "destabilize" Venezuela. During his April 24 radio broadcast of "Alo, President," Chavez said, "The empire, the Venezuelan elite, and their international allies...have turned an insignificant decision by this

government into a matter of global concern. On May 28, we are going to strike another lethal blow to the American empire and (its allies)." Despite mounting national and international criticism, BRV officials continue to affirm their intention to revoke RCTV's license.

BROWNFIELD